DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON, PRESENTER: Dr. Richard Shapcott is the senior lecturer in International Relations at the University of Queensland. His areas of interest in research concern international ethics, cosmopolitan political theory and cultural diversity. He is the author of the recently published book titled *International Ethics: A Critical Introduction*; and several other pieces, such as, "Anti-Cosmopolitanism, the Cosmopolitan Harm Principle and Global Dialogue," in Michalis' and Petito's book, *Civilizational Dialogue and World Order*. He's also the author of "Dialogue and International Ethics: Religion, Cultural Diversity and Universalism, in Patrick Hayden's, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Ethics and International Relations*.

This interview will discuss the role of democracy in political, cosmopolitan ethics. It was recorded during a lunch at the Customs House in Brisbane, a historically significant heritage building, with pleasing stone façades, and a grand view of the Brisbane River.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Given the attention paid to moral pluralism in international ethics, would you argue that "there are certain rudimentary human universals," in the words of Donald Brown, "that can be identified to help shape international projects"?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Yes and no, I guess is my answer to that one. I'm not exactly sure how Donald Brown means that, but it's very clear that there are certain basic physical universals that as human beings we need to survive. In order to survive, we need food and shelter; a fair bit of social interaction and that sort of things. There are very clear physical universals that the human body requires as any other animal requires. It is enough to think that our psyche requires social interaction and no man is an island. And so having a community of some sort, whether it be a family or a wider community, is a very important part of who we are. So if we're talking about human universals in terms of the things that characterize us all as human beings, that's certainly the case.

Beyond that, if we're talking about universals that we all might agree upon, that's not a resolved question and I hold out the hope that we may be – or that we are in principal, capable of agreeing on some things. That's still an open question so i wouldn't certainly go so far saying there are already identifiable areas of moral agreement. I think that's always too easy to assume.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: If we did assume that there are these areas of moral ethics that could be universal to humanity, how could we identify those? Do we have to depend on heuristic methods? Or could we approach this question through empirical devises or is that beyond the mere capacities of one person?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: My view of this is that it's not a matter of identifying preexisting ones; it's a matter of working towards making new ones or making shared agreements. I see them socially constructed, in the jargon. That is, they are a product of human beings'

minds and facility for language. Therefore any universals we want to have in thoughts, we would need to in a sense, create them.

There's a nice quote that Chris Brown uses from Richard Rorty about ethics being, and communities being, "shaped rather than found." And I think that's a nice way to think about it; that we are in a position where we have an ongoing challenge to shape these universals, rather than to identify them. But that doesn't mean we can't, of course, engage in dialogue with everybody, so to speak, to seek to understand where we are. So that's the first stage. Rather than of empirically identifying basic shared norms, the real question is how we interpret those norms and how – in order to identify what people believe, we need to engage in dialogue with each other about this. And so there's a great deal of merit, indeed it is necessary to engage in dialogue with different ethical and moral traditions and communities to understand each other. And that's the basis, as I see it, of any genuine moral universalism we may create. We may identify things that we have in common, we may identify the ways we interpret thing differently, and we have to ask question, can we build something new? Can we come to share some new understandings?

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Excellent. Would you argue that there is a balance between general laws and the relative context they're being observed in? Should this always help our efforts to help outsiders or even compatriots?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Well, a concept that appeals to me very much is the Aristotelian concept of phronesis which is employed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his account of *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, which I draw upon a lot. Aristotle's claim and Gadamer's claim is that in ethical thinking, that is what we are always doing. It's the back and forward between universal ideas, principles, instances and circumstances. So in that sense, I think that's the essence of ethical reasoning, and that applies to all instances of it. Or rather, that's the most desirable way to think about what we're doing rather than to simply derive empirical rules or universal rules that we simply than apply to all cases. That we need to constantly be aware of context, and how context transforms and feedbacks on the universal. In that sense, that question speaks to my understanding of that concept of phronesis.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Let's move on to focusing more on cosmopolitanism. How can anti-cosmopolitanism maintain the theory of a nation when that concept is increasingly more difficult to define, specifically due to the effects of modern migration and the diversification of citizenries?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Well, I think that they try to – well, not all anti-cosmopolitans use the idea of nation or nationhood. Some have other kinds of allegiances to community. I think it's a very important question. Yah, I guess as always for us academics, it depends on what you mean by the nation. And my sense is that they can do it partly because that's the language and the belief system that most of the world continues to operate in. Of course, there are many – it's much more problematic than it used to be. There are a lot

more other claims to sub-national identity or more fractured national identity. But most people, many people still continue to live and work understanding themselves as being members of nations and that's a very powerful idea that, despite migration and globalization, continues to hold quite a powerful grip on human imagination and political community. So while it is being a little more fractured, it is still there. So that's the first part of the answer: they can do that because it's how people live their lives. And this becomes clearer when you start to ask questions about how we should treat outsiders. That's when those distinctions really come up and when people start to make that distinction. And that's when the ethical content of nationalism becomes emergent.

I think on the other hand, that they can also, for the part of the national/anti-cosmopolitan claim is not simply an empirical claim about what people do but also about how we ought to live. And in that case, though you've got a perfectly reasonable case to say well, this nation has formed and has performed a useful role in giving people a strong sense of identity and belonging, in a world of conflict and change and those sorts of thing. So there's a normative claim of defense of the nation in one form or another that has quite a lot of merit to it.

I mean, it's not so much the contemporary transformations of political life, you know, we in Australia are lucky in many ways to live in a country that is what they call, a settler society. And we are not as beholden by history when it comes to our concept of our identity. So Australia, the United States, and Canada have a tradition of incorporating new arrivals in them all the time. It's sometimes contested and sometimes not so friendly and people are selective and what not, but there is that sense that we don't have that ethnic concept of the nation in the same way that older European societies may have. And that provides us with the capacity to reimagine our nation along different lines.

But the really interesting thing for me about anti-cosmopolitanism and their conception of the nation is (I'm thinking of someone like David Miller who doesn't seem to incorporate the historical theories of nationalism) of how it is we come to live in nations. They take the nation for granted, as some sort of political community. Because they want to defend it, they want to defend certain achievements of it. And I think that's problematic for them. Because if they don't understand that the nation is a historically formed community that you know, a thousand years ago, nobody lived in nations as we understand them. Then that raises the question about the future of the nation and its defensibility; and asks us to at least examine the possibility that nations are changing and may be becoming something else.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: We're now just going to be discussing democracy and cosmopolitanism, specifically this idea of a basic democracy which ties into questions asked before about basic and perhaps universal parameters for all humanity. It might be something tied in to perhaps the id, to those social formations you spoke of earlier. But before we do that, it's quite important for us to know how you conceptualize democracy?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: How I conceptualize democracy? I guess, not having given a lot of thought to democracy per se, my thinking has mostly been concerned with dialogue and cosmopolitanism. So I guess in so far as I think about the dialogical aspects of democracy that I think are ethnically important ones. Democracy serves many important functions in society. It's a way of resolving interest, conflicts of interests, and allowing, managing complex societies to work, and work through issues. And, I guess, from my perspective, I like to think of democracy as being the chief advantage. The advantage of democracy is that it provides the way forward for including everybody in the rules that govern them. And that sort of Habermasian/Kantian type approach is where I come from.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Excellent.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: It doesn't have to take a particular institutional form, in one sense. Though it does have to have certain basic criteria that everybody be, in principal able to participate, where no one is excluded, or by virtue of any arbitrary criteria that's not morally relevant. I want to exclude psychopaths. [laughter] But we don't want to exclude any particular religious group or any racial group or gender or anything like that.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: If we suppose that something like this next question exists, I'm very interested in going through a thought experiment with you. The theory of basic democracy argues that the democracy from which all democratic typologies or styles or different theories stem in institutionally practiced, historically seen and supposed for the future, is based upon a universal structure, observable in any polity, regardless of its ethnicity, race or government. This point is supported by an argument called the archaeo-anthropologic argument: that democracy has been practiced through very rudimentary institutions such as communication, notions of equality and normative values that define its laws and implicit understanding of who are the leaders during the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods, 46000 years ago. Should this statement be true, what implications would this have ethically now?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Well, my first response is none. In the sense that – I don't' want to go too far with this argument – but there is merit to the idea that you can't derive an 'ought' from an 'is' in that sense. That argument has been contested and the exact relationship between them is more problematic than that argument suggests. But my point is that, what matters is how we think about it, and how we talk about, and what significance we give to it rather than whether or not it does exist empirically. Just because human beings may have demonstrated a capacity for X or Y, doesn't mean that it's a good thing or a desirable thing. It might mean that some things are more possible than others but it doesn't in itself, necessarily lead us to any particular, ethical conclusions.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Right.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Human beings have been engaged in warfare and violence and altruism and all sorts of things for millennia. That's part of who we are. So if questions we have to deal with, as ethics deal with, are what do we do, how do we act? So if such a structure were identifiable, through some questions about the possibility of these sort of claims, to be able to objectively do that, were reasonably persuasive, the question is, "Well, okay, some people might say that is the case but, you know, since then, we've had other messages from God or told us how to live or we have learnt other things that tell us X or Y is a better form of society." Or as my limited understanding of the Marxist tradition suggest, you know, these were simpler societies. They were communist, pluralist societies and it's easier to do. We live in much more complex societies with a division of labour and class structures and what not. And this makes it harder for us – or rather, this would make it necessarily less appropriate perhaps for these societies, or less possible for these societies.

So in itself, being able to identify anything like that is fascinating and interesting but it does not necessarily lead us to any conclusion about the value or not of democracy. That's a question we have to work out for ourselves. Why do we value it? What do we value about it? And so my argument would be that if we wanted to recognize that democracy is valuable for a number of reasons, this is where the usual distinctions start to collapse because it tends to account for certain properties which human beings possess. That we can identify but also which we can value and which in the frameworks – moral frameworks that we live in make more sense, in the sense that it's fairly hard to argue that most people don't have some sort of moral sense; some sort of capacity for agency; some capacity to make choices between right and wrong whenever they make a decision; some capacity for control over their own lives, whether or not we go all the way with Kant on that for agency or rationality, is another question or what not, but I think it's fairly hard to deny that these days unless you have some sort of ideological commitment against that. There are some other overriding factors that you may want to invoke, but they're fairly hard to invoke these days.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Very interesting, thank you for that. We're nearly at the back end of our interview. I suppose this question should go rather easily. If we were to remove democratic theory from the ownership of western ideology and giving it to a cosmopolitan, universalist one, are we changing the ethics of democratization?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Are we changing the ethics? Well, it depends on how you understand democratization.

If by that you mean that democracy now becomes some common heritage of humankind, and that people all over the world interpret democracy in different ways then yes, it's not necessarily up to us how people interpret democracy. But if you allow for different ways of being in the democratic sprit, then, of course, yes, it changes democracy and democratization because it becomes in political terms less tied to certain institutional programs like representative democracy or voting or those types of questions. There are other ways that democratic values can be perhaps achieved, and if

that's what that question is directed at; it changes what we mean by democracy and in unforeseeable ways. I think it's fairly clear from the history of democracy it's very changeable and robust an idea. There have been many different forms of it.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: It seems that at present, the current practice of applying a specific typology of democracy with its own institutions on a pluralist citizenry which may find those institutions inappropriate, perhaps the U.S.A's attempt to transplant a version of liberal constitutional democracy in Iraq is a good example, is contrary to the harm principal. Would you agree with this statement and why?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: I would agree with that statement to the point on which it's about imposition. Imposition without consent is a violation of the 'basic principle' or in Kantian terms, violation of "categorical imperative," but it's a violation of the gist of what democracy is. Democracy is about consent and an imposed political form of democracy implies a lack of consent. So that is certainly reconcilable with a conception of the harm principle, with the human capacity for agency for making decisions, for choosing things.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Does observing basic democracy in its citizenry and then using the data derived for measuring certain universal variables and then improving, adopting or constructing the necessary institutions, seem like a better alternative – perhaps something that might not be in the violation of the harm principle – an appropriate or inappropriate style of democracy?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Well, by basic democracy you referring to that theory of basic democracy you referred to earlier? Is that –

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Oh, yes. It's – we can scratch the basic democracy.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: [laughs] Well, like I said before the language of that question is a bit problematic for me. I would reinterpret that to say that any viable democracy, any viable political community has to be consistent with and come out of the values of the people that it's there to serve and so if we identify democratic with dialogic practices in any particular communities then those perhaps should be encouraged and reformulated or dealt with, worked with, in order to achieve a more democratic result; a better outcome for the people involved. But I have problems with the idea of empirically identifying democracy. These are values, these aren't facts.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Perhaps our approach is too technocratic.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: For my taking, for my liking, yeah. I think technocratic results like that tend to within themselves open up to capacities for anti-democratic behavior. Because you stand on some ground that says, "I have knowledge of you that's better than you do." "Because I'm a technocrat, I understand this better than you do and therefore I'm

going to apply it." That's contrary to the spirit of dialogue and democracy which is about having an agreement about things.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Fantastic. Amartya Sen has argued that democracy is now a universal right. I agree with this statement because I view democracy, or power without violence, and non-democracy, or power through violence, as two simple structures of socio-political organization that we have perhaps designed through evolution. I feel that government without violence and government through violence are very old structures with late-modern morality pointing towards the necessity to have a government without violence. Given this argument, what is your view of democracy as a universal right? Does it have a place in cosmopolitanism?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: That's a very loaded question. There are a lot of terms to deal with, to problematize before you can answer that. First one is the language of rights and the capacity to speak on universal – of universalism in those terms; that's an assumption. There's an increasingly broad consensus that seems to be the language in which people talk about universalism. It seems to have become a language that's acceptable to many people, a language of rights, so there should be a right to democracy. Let me just say that rights is only one language of cosmopolitanism. And there are other ways. Some people talk about obligations. Some people talk about cosmopolitanism as an ethos rather than a particular political expression of it.

From Sen's quote I would suggest, yes, we can certainly think about the right of democratization because that is the right of consent. That's a principal of consent in regards to the matters of the political institutions that affect us. So in that sense yes, if that's what he means by democracy and that concept, that content, and that makes perfect sense to me. That would seem to be the essence of something like Habermas's or Andrews Linkalter's conception of cosmopolitanism.

Now the other part of the question was…

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Just if democracy, if it is a universal right, does it have a place in cosmopolitanism?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Yes, well, of course, I think so. The cosmopolitan version that I have is not just moral universalism but cosmopolitanism is derived from the principal of universal consent.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Okay.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: And therefore some form of democratic right of association and participation, is involved in it. And that belongs to everybody in relationship to everybody else. Not just in relationship to your particular community that you inhabit, but rather to any community ultimately or any individual that affects you, or that you affect with your actions.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Fantastic. I find that several terms we currently use in political discourse are not ethically sound.

[Laughter]

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: One of them includes calling OECD countries, "democratized" and, or, "developed", when realistically these states have a wide variety of democratically styled governments and are continually in the process of developing. Should we reconsider the way we use these terms?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: I see no problems with that. It certainly seems to be from the outside, the United States seems to be a country that has problem with its democracy. It seems to have an arcane form of democracy and has been superseded by others, but it does not recognize that. So I would – there would certainly be great use of reminding ourselves that democracy is an ongoing project and not a final or completed one. So I can certainly see the political use of changing those terminologies.

Of course, those terminologies extend from international institutions that are seeking to provide criteria for various activities and ways of classifying states and communities into particular forms; modeled upon a conception and an ideal type that they wish to or that they think that they embody. And so it serves a certain function for them to do that.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: If a methodology could be conceived of what would permit a country to understand, in real time – and here we're trying to bring in the technology of perhaps, communication between citizenry and the government. If the government could understand in real time what its pluralist citizenry considered or considers to be equality, law, communication and the selection of officials – these broad ever-changing concepts, would that provide benefit to a government in power or to an opposition? Is such a goal possible? Will we ever be able to define, perhaps, a basic understanding of all the different conceptualizations that all of the different individuals have of these terms?

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Interesting question. There is an implicit assumption in that question that it would be a good thing to have this capacity because it would allow our governments to, or politicians, to better represent and understand their population. And that if somehow we knew that better we would be better respond to it.

My concern with that proposal would be that if it's a one way street, then it's just a tool for further domination and manipulation. That opens up the capacity for the states to – or perhaps differently in the light of common politics, current politics – it opens up the possibility of politics that's purely responsive to public opinion on a minute by minute basis; that sort of hyper poll-driven politics. And while, of course, we want our politicians to be responsive to us, that's not necessarily clearly the best way of doing it. I don't think it would be. I can't quite see the advantage of real time minute to minute

understanding things –

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Perhaps it would have more advantage in the intellectual world.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Well, it's always good to know what people are thinking. That's a useful thing to have, and it's good to know that people's thoughts change over time and we just don't see how they have changed. But in the hands of government it becomes a – or any authority figure, corporations, whatever – it becomes a means. The first question is going to be: how are we going to manipulate this to get the ends we want? So it's a one way street. I'm much more interested in ways that we can …

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Mitigate the ill-effects of perhaps –

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Well, we can turn it into a two-way street. It's a dialogical process.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: That's right.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Where people have ongoing conversations about this, and mutually inform each other in this rather than just respond as if they were talking to Alan Jones on Sydney radio.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: [laughs]

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Or something like that. That's always a danger. These things should be a way to mutually inform each other. One of the great problems we have is that our society is very poorly informed about things, and opinion and emotion count for too much in those arguments. And much more better to have an informed population, I think. [laughs]

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Indeed, the perennial problem I think.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Of course. Yes, indeed.

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: Well, again, thank you very much for answering the last question as well. A bit of a curve ball I wanted to throw at you.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: [laughs]

DR. JEAN-PAUL GAGNON: And, yes, it really was our implicit intention with that question to sort of feel out whether this would be a good avenue to approach for the improvement of governance. Of whether it had ethical problems to it and that's really the reason we wanted to push that in this interview. Again, Dr. Shapcott, thank you very much for your time.

DR. RICHARD SHAPCOTT: Thank you. Greatly appreciate it, most interesting.